



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Superintendents' Webcast

SUMMARY

WEBCAST DATE: MAY 26, 2020

SUMMARY:

A summary of this [webcast](#) also can be found in [Kentucky Teacher](#).

Agenda Item: Welcome

Presenter: Kevin C. Brown, Interim Commissioner

Summary of Discussion:

Interim Commissioner Kevin C. Brown welcomed everyone and provided a brief overview of the agenda.

Interim Director of Communications Toni Konz Tatman shared the link for viewing [Kentucky's Tribute to the Class of 2020](#) and thanked everyone for their work in compiling the video.

The group was reminded that the search for a new commissioner is ongoing and the deadline for applications and nominations is May 31.

Agenda Item: COVID-19 Updates with the Kentucky Department for Public Health

Presenters: Dr. Steven Stack, MD, MBA, FACEP, Commissioner

Dr. Connie White, Deputy Commissioner

Dr. Emily Messerli, Branch Manager

Rebecca Gillis, Director of Preparedness

Kentucky Department for Public Health (KDHP)

Summary of Discussion:

Dr. Steven Stack reviewed information about COVID-19, actions that have been taken to avoid spreading the infection and expectations for dealing with this crisis moving forward. There is no treatment and a vaccine will not be available until 2021. To reduce the spread of infection, social distancing and enhanced hygiene practices must be implemented in public settings.

Details can be found in the [presentation](#) used during the [webcast](#).

Stack answered several questions before leaving the call.

Question: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines published for school buses has been to seat one child per seat, every other seat. Districts are unable to transport with those guidelines and if transportation is not provided, school cannot be in session. Is there any realistic guidance for school buses?

Answer: This is a real challenge and there is no good answer. If children are placed too close together, they will spread infection. Children are less likely than adults to comply with social distancing practices.

Question: What is the guidance on whether all staff and students will be required to wear masks for start of the 2020-2021 school year?

Answer: The situation is fluid but at present, the guidance is unlikely to change. If people are coming together in a relatively confined space, they must wear masks.

Question: Does KDPH have guidance on testing all school employees before returning to school?

Answer: There is value to testing, but it is only a snapshot in time and results can change the next day. Testing is not discouraged, but there is no guidance about mandatory testing at this time.

Question: It sounds as if school cannot open in the fall. Are their recommendations to make reopening a possibility?

Answer: The social, economic and health consequences of this disease have been devastating. In a response to the public's need to come together again, Kentucky has implemented Phase 1 of the reopening. The results in states that opened earlier in May will be used to inform decisions in Kentucky. There is no easy answer, but it is premature to reach the conclusion that school cannot open in the fall. It may be determined that the tradeoff between bringing more students together than desired and students falling further behind in their education is significant enough to pursue reopening options. There may be more clarity in a few weeks, when the effects of Kentucky's and other states' reopening efforts have been studied.

Question: When collecting materials from students, how long should they remain untouched to avoid spreading the COVID-19 virus?

Answer: Most materials are OK after a few days, although that is not the likely mode of transmission. The bigger concern should be students coughing, laughing and sneezing while in close to others. Cloth items are harder to disinfect, but the virus should deactivate itself after a few days. Surfaces that can be sanitized should be wiped between student contact when possible.

Question: Keeping a mask on very young children and students with sensory issues will be a challenge. Is guidance available?

Answer: When it is unsafe or developmentally inappropriate to wear a mask, students should not wear masks. In that case, the individuals working with the students who cannot wear a mask should wear masks.

Dr. Connie White resumed the presentation from KDPH to inform districts of the most important personal prevention practices. She reminded district leaders to be creative and CDC guidance for schools states, "Implementation should be guided by what is feasible, practical, acceptable and tailored to the needs of each community."

Dr. Emily Messerli explained that when school nurses are not available, a COVID-19 health coordinator should be identified. She provided examples of how nurses and health coordinators can help during the school day and reminded the group that the purpose of these actions is to minimize the spread of infection. Messerli described several safety actions to implement in schools to limit the spread of disease.

Rebecca Gillis highlighted several ways schools can maintain a healthy environment through daily cleaning, busing activities and feeding. Superintendents were reminded to follow directions on cleaning products and ensure proper ventilation when using disinfection cleaners. Students should eat in the classroom and bring their own water bottles instead of using the water fountain. Ongoing staff training about maintaining a healthy environment is essential to mitigate the risk of spreading illness.

Questions were answered by KDPH and KDE staff.

Question: Could districts allow students from the same family to sit together on buses?

Answer: Yes, student living in the same household could sit together on the bus.

Question: Are the guidelines presented recommendations or mandates?

Answer: This guidance is based on science, but districts also must tailor the guidance to their community based on feasibility and accessibility. The closer districts can get to following the guidelines, the less likely it is they will have COVID-19 issues at school. The KDPH cannot mandate anything to the districts, but the recommendations are backed up by scientific evidence. Districts are encouraged to demonstrate a good faith effort.

Question: Districts have received conflicting guidance on the type of hand sanitizer that should be purchased for safe use by students, but strong enough to combat COVID-19. Please clarify.

Answer: The CDC recommends that hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol may be used when soap and water is not available. Products used to clean surfaces should contain at least 70% alcohol.

Question: What are the recommendations about how high school students should change classes?

Answer: Allowing normal class changes in high school creates a contact tracing nightmare. High schools have the opportunity to use a hybrid model, where students alternate between in-person and remote learning. Another option is asking teachers to change classrooms instead of students.

Question: If teachers switch classrooms instead of students, would teachers become carriers?

Answer: Adults are more likely to adhere to social distancing guidelines and less likely to pass illness than students passing in the hallways.

Question: How can districts keep a teacher with one group of students for the entire day when middle and high school teachers are only certified in one subject?

Answer: Grouping students who attend similar classes and can stay together for longer periods during the day is an option. Technology alternatives could also be used within the school building.

Question: High school students cannot be grouped together for long periods due to the nature of scheduling. What is the distance from each other students must maintain if they wear masks?

Answer: The mask reduces the risk of infection; staying 6 feet apart further reduces the risk. Districts should work within their constraints to get as close to the guidelines as possible. The more that is done, the lower the risk.

Question: Should districts purchase masks for everyone or can they require everyone to bring their own? What happens when students do not bring their masks back to school?

Answer: There is no magic answer. Some students will bring their masks and some will need a new mask every day.

Question: If a student tests positive, who will need to quarantine for 14 days?

Answer: It depends on how much close contact has occurred and for how long the close contact occurred.

Question: Will there be rules or specific guidance about sending students home for COVID-related symptoms? Districts must avoid discriminatory practices.

Answer: Written guidance based on CDC guidelines will be released, but it should be the same symptoms students are already sent home for.

Question: Must masks be washed daily?

Answer: It is recommended, although the masks must be dry.

Question: Masks can interfere with school safety due to covering the face. Is there guidance regarding masking and school safety?

Answer: Students should not wear masks if their health or safety is compromised. Some medical conditions prohibit the extended use of masks. For identification purposes, students can be required to wear a photo identification at all times.

Question: Who is the authority on school reopening, KDPH or the local school board?

Answer: School districts and local school boards make those decisions, but they are state actors. State actors will work in tandem with other state agencies during a global health pandemic. If conflict arises, legal answers can be pursued. The commissioner of education and KDPH have the authority to intercede if necessary to prevent the spread of disease.

Question: Can clarification be provided to address the conflicting message about opening doors and windows for ventilation and Safe Schools requirements to keep windows and doors closed and locked?

Answer: The state school security marshal and the Kentucky Center for School Safety are working on guidance to address the alignment between health and safety.

Question: Are the guidelines being vetted for realistic expectations by classroom teachers and administrators?

Answer: KDPH issues the guidance, but districts should include multiple stakeholders including parent, teachers, administrators and custodial staff when implementing the guidance.

Question: If districts implement guidance in different ways, is there an increased risk of potential lawsuits?

Answer: School districts are the largest “business” in the county and there will be lawsuits. Some protective legislation has been discussed. Frivolous lawsuits against school districts existed before COVID-19 and they will continue to exist. The usual standard is whether a district acted in a reasonable manner. Please note, KDE’s general counsel cannot provide legal advice to districts. Districts should consult with their local board counsel to make reasonable decisions under the circumstances.

Question: How many students may ride the bus together?

Answer: It depends on the size of the bus. Students should be spread out as much as possible and it is better if they wear masks. The closer students are to each other, the more likely they are to spread infection if someone has the virus. If students are closer together than recommended, they should wear masks.

Question: With this guidance, school cannot reopen. Would it be better to plan for non-traditional instruction (NTI) this fall?

Answer: It has been advised that districts have a playbook of multiple options allowing them to pivot quickly and efficiently if needed, especially during the first semester. The schedule districts submit by July 31 likely will not be implemented as planned. It is a heavy lift but there are ways schools may be able to re-open, although it is possible the semester may have to begin with NTI. The strong recommendation is that districts develop plans for multiple scenarios. There should be more data to inform reopening decisions in June.

Question: Who gets quarantined when a student tests positive?

Answer: Contact tracing plans and guidelines will be shared with districts when they are available.

Question: Are schools or health departments responsible for contact tracing? If it is the health department, will schools be notified or asked to provide lists of students with whom the infected student came into contact?

Answer: The health department will notify the infected person and the school, so notification can be given to those who were in close contact with the infected student. Protocols are in place for contact tracing of communicable diseases allowing schools to share the information with the health department, if FERPA is a concern.

Question: When will districts know which waivers will be granted for the 2020-2021 school year? It is difficult to plan for innovation with these restrictions.

Answer: KDE will ask the cabinet secretary to implement an executive order for unlimited NTI days for the 2020-2021 school year. The order is expected to be signed by mid-June. Other issues will be addressed as well, such as attendance with a hybrid model.

Question: With the "non-negotiable" on busing, when will KDE provide definitive guidance on funding impacts so districts can finalize financial and operational plans? How will current funding be adjusted to accommodate recommendations?

Answer: Funding issues are under consideration, but the General Assembly will not be able to act until the session begins in January, unless a special session is called.

Question: Can clarification be provided about the expectations for athletics and other extra-curricular activities?

Answer: Julian Tackett, the commissioner of the Kentucky High School Athletic Association, will be invited to an upcoming webcast to answer questions about athletics.

Question: How will serving lunch in the classroom work under the constraints of [KRS 158.060](#), which requires teachers have a duty-free lunch?

Answer: There is no definitive answer yet, but the issue is on the radar. Schools also may consider rotating staff, if possible, so students eat in the classroom and teachers still receive a duty-free lunch.

Question: Will KDE create a health and hygiene document stating what is allowed and not allowed when in-person classes resume? This would help ensure consistency among all school districts.

Answer: KDPH is working on that document and it is expected to be released next week.

Question: When will the issue of school liability be discussed as it pertains to COVID-19?

Answer: That was addressed in a previous question, but can be a topic at an upcoming webcast so districts are aware of the liabilities and immunities that affect school districts, if needed.

Question: When schools reopen, will there be an infection rate that would result in the closing of schools?

Answer: The local health department would make that determination as part of the contact tracing protocol, as is currently the practice with influenza and other infectious disease outbreaks.

Question: Would face shields be a better choice for teachers?

Answer: Air circulates under the shield, so mist can escape more easily than from a mask.

Question: The "Initial Steps" included in last week's [slides](#) included "Establish a Healthy at Work Communications Plan." Will a model plan be provided to guide districts in developing their plans?

Answer: The guidance being developed by KDPH and KDE will likely take the place of a Healthy at School plan. A repository of district plans has been developed by the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents. The Kentucky Educational Development Corporation is also collecting model documents for district use.

Question: How will districts ensure confidentiality of students with contact tracing?

Answer: Confidentiality is of utmost importance and security measures are in place to protect students' confidentiality.

Question: Is information available about funding from the General Assembly to support SB 1? Districts have received no information and needed for personnel and facilities.

Answer: The answer will be sent to superintendents this evening or tomorrow morning.

Feedback:

None.

Follow-up Required:

None.

Agenda Item: Adjournment

Presenter: Kevin C. Brown, Interim Commissioner

Discussion:

Superintendents will receive email with information about SB 1 funding and a link to the P-EBT meeting being held on May 29.

Beginning next week, the Superintendents Advisory Council will meet every other week.

Brown ended the meeting by expressing his gratitude for the hard work of education professionals across the state. Unanswered questions will be addressed in the Q&A document and during next week's webcast.

The next superintendents webcast is scheduled for Tuesday, June 2, at 2 p.m. ET.